

REMARKS

The following remarks are made in response to the Office Action mailed August 26, 2005. Included with this response is a Request for Continued Examination. Applicant hereby authorizes the Office to debit deposit account 20-0823 in the amount of \$395.00 for the fee associated with the Request for Continued Examination. It is believed this amount is sufficient. If it is not, the Office is authorized to debit any necessary amounts and credit any excess fees to deposit account 20-0823.

Claims 1-8, 10-15, 17-20, 22, 23, and 25-27 are pending in the application. Claims 1, 10, 17, 25, 26, and 27 have been amended. The amendments are the similar in scope to those proposed to the Examiner during an interview with the undersigned on October 31, 2005. The Examiner is thanked for his courtesies extended during that interview and his consideration of the proposed claims. Applicant respectfully requests further consideration of the newly amended claims in view of the following remarks.

In the Office Action, the claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Japan 53-40995. The Office Action maintains that the broken lines shown in figures 3 and 4 of JP '995 comprise a hatch formed in a pre-located topside deck of the vessel and this is sufficient to render claims 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 22 and 25-27 anticipated.

However, JP '995 shows a construction for the converted vessel that is entirely different from that recited in the claims. JP '995 discloses adding a trunk structure to a converted vessel that extends above the original topside deck and forms a multi-elevation topside deck. The trunk structure increases the volume of the central cargo tank, which was otherwise lost in the conversion. JP '995 shows forming walls for the trunk structure that extend above the top side

deck and that are aligned with the port and starboard bulkheads below the deck. Additionally, JP '995 discloses use of angled corners in the central cargo tank.

As amended herein, the independent claims 1, 10, 17, and 25 require that the converted vessel maintain its original spanning, single elevation, pre-located topside deck and that the hatch opening be formed in the pre-located topside deck with a peripheral edge of the hatch opening spaced away from and inboard of the pre-located port and starboard sidewalls of the central cargo tank so that the hatch opening and topside deck remain at a substantially single elevation with minimal degradation of structural integrity of the topside deck. The single topside deck provides the advantage of reducing the material required for the conversion while maximizing the available space on the topside deck. In the vessel of JP '995, available deck space is reduced because of the trunk structure and the additional braces that must be used on the deck to support the trunk structure. In the vessel of the present invention, the hatch may be placed on the deck rather than on an elevated structure formed above the deck, thereby facilitating removal and storage of the hatch.

The claims of the present invention also require that the elevated floor be substantially the same width as the width of the central cargo tank and at a single elevation. The recited arrangement optimizes use of the maximum allotted volume in the central cargo tank while the angled corners in JP '995 reduce volume in the cargo hold.

Because JP '995 fails to suggest or show a converted vessel with

- a single elevation topside deck; and
- a hatch formed in the topside deck with a peripheral edge spaced away from and inboard of the longitudinal bulkheads; and
- a single elevation spanning elevated floor in the central cargo tank,

as recited in independent claims 1, 10, 17, and 25, the claims are patentable over the JP '995 reference.

The claims are also patentable over JP 58-174078 ("JP '078"). JP '078 shows a conversion where the existing port and starboard bulkheads are cut and relocated to positions outboard of their original positions defining the central cargo tank. The relocated bulkheads define a new cargo carrying hold of the vessel with increased volume. As discussed in applicant's prior response filed on May 5, 2005, the JP '078 reference fails to teach converting the single hull vessel into double hull construction by providing an elevated floor that spans between existing or pre-located port and starboard sidewalls of the cargo tank. Because the claims require using the existing or pre-located bulkheads or sidewalls that form the central cargo tank, the recited arrangement provides the advantage of significantly reducing the scope of the conversion and eliminating the possibility of compromising the structural integrity of the vessel by otherwise relocating significant internal structures of the vessel.

Additionally, because JP '078 discusses providing inclined partition walls at the base of the newly relocated port and starboard bulkheads, the JP '078 reference also fails to show or suggest providing an added elevated floor having substantially a single elevation parallel to the spanning topside deck and being substantially the same width as a width of the central cargo tank. For all of these reasons, it is submitted that claims 1, 10, 17, and 25 are patentable over JP '078.

With respect to the Hagner and Garcia references cited in the Office Action, it is submitted that these references, whether considered together or apart, fail to provide any additional teachings to render the claims obvious. The Office Action relies upon the Hagner

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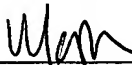
reference for teaching of providing a plurality of bottom plates. The Office Action alleges that it would be obvious to combine the teachings of Hagner and that of JP '995 so as to eliminate the handling of one large plate for forming the double bottom. However, this conclusion is not supported by the express teaching of JP '995, which in fact shows forming a large hatch opening by cutting the deck plate, and using the material removed to form the inner bottom as a means to substantially reduce the amount of steel product required for the conversion. JP '995 at p. 6.

The Garcia reference is relied upon for the teaching of providing a longitudinal bulkhead in the central cargo compartment to further subdivide the cargo hull. However, the Garcia reference fails to provide any additional teaching to render independent claims 1, 10, 17, and 25 obvious.

In view of the foregoing, it is submitted that the claims of the application are now in a condition for allowance and notification to that effect is earnestly solicited at the Examiner's earliest convenience. Th Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone if any other matters require resolution prior to notification of allowance.

Respectfully submitted,
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